



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NOTES AND NEWS

PRE-COLUMBIAN SYPHILIS IN YUCATAN.—Le Plongeon is of opinion that there is a connection between the Mayas of Yucatan and Asia. In his letter to me, which I gave *in extenso* in my article, "Pre-Columbian Leprosy" (Journal of American Medical Association, 1895), he says:

"As to Yucatan, where I have resided during eleven years, mostly among the aborigines, I do not recollect having met with a single leprous case among them. There were a few cases of syphilis where they have had contact with the whites. Today the Indian population of Yucatan seems to be a particularly healthy, vigorous race. I have seen cases of leprosy, but they were confined to the Creoles. Two of the principal families of Merida, the capital, are known to be leprous. Juan Peon Contreras, a member of said families, who generally intermarry among themselves, although very wealthy, was at one time director of the Yucatan Museum and a disgusting object to look at, literally falling to pieces. Still he was commingling with other people without hindrance. Another such case I saw at the island of Cozumel. I repeat, the cases are rare. I have no doubt that the disease was known in the country ages before the advent of the Spaniards. The Maya word for leprosy is *naycan*, from the verb *nay*, to corrode, to eat up. This is not a name of modern invention. It is found in the dictionaries and vocabularies of the language made by the Franciscans in the sixteenth century. I have a small medical book written in Maya language by a native one hundred years ago, but I do not find in it any mention of leprosy.

"My study of the mural paintings in the funeral chamber of Prince Coh, at Chichen, also of the bas-reliefs that adorn the walls of the public monuments in that ancient city, proves to me that in remote ages the inhabitants of Yucatan—in fact, of all Central America—had as close communication with those of all other civilized countries as they have today. They had close relations with India and Indo-China, where they introduced their civilization, as I show in my book, 'Queen Moo and the Egyptian Sphinx,' that will be given publicity in two or three months. I discovered portraits of Carthaginians sculptured on the walls, representations of negroes from Africa, Mongolians from east Asia, Burmese from Indo-China, etc., painted and carved on pillars and walls. In fact, the Nagas, the serpent-worshippers, who developed such high civilization in the south of India and the Indian peninsula, were immigrants from *Patala* (America), who reached Asia in times anterior to the invasion of India by the Aryans.

"I do not suppose that sailors in those times were more careful than sailors in our days, and I have no doubt that they spread diseases among

the inhabitants of the countries they visited, just as the crews of Captain Cook spread syphilis among those of the islands in the Pacific. The communication between Asia and America being then frequent, there can be no doubt that such contagious diseases as syphilis and leprosy were disseminated throughout the earth's inhabitants as they are today, and it seems to me impossible to determine where such a peculiar disease originated. We know that at one time syphilis was as common in America as leprosy in East India, and it is most probable that the inhabitants of these countries interchanged compliments, those of America introducing syphilis into Asia, those of Asia importing leprosy into America."

Mr Mercer, the curator of the section of American and prehistoric archeology, University of Pennsylvania, says in a communication that he does not share these views. "I have," he says, "discovered no proof for Le Plongeon's startling deductions as to the age of the Mayas and their migrations, but rather the contrary." He advised me to write to Mr Edward H. Thompson, of Merida, Yucatan, a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, who has been hunting about Chichen Itza and other ruins for ten years or more and copying the very paintings which Le Plongeon says are representations of negroes, Mongolians, Burmese, etc. This gentleman writes: "Don't build too much on Le Plongeon's theories or claims. Not a single point of contact between the old and new worlds before the Columbian era can be proved by monuments or facts so far found in Yucatan or adjoining provinces. The Maya word you quote may have in the olden times referred to leprosy. *Naycam-Kanay* is used today as the term for a leper, yet my opinion is that in the olden times it was used more for consumption, phthisis. *Nayal* is used when one is fainting from *extreme debility*. I have found many skeletons, but have never observed the evidences of leprosy." Mr Mercer referred me also to Mr Teoberto Maler, who has been exploring sepulchers in various parts of Yucatan for many years and who is the correspondent of the German societies. This gentleman in his reply, dated Ticul, Yucatan, November 20, 1895, says:

"*Syphilis*: According to the ancient Spanish historians, it seems without any doubt that syphilis is an original American disease, and the Spaniards found it for the first time among the Indians of Haiti, Cuba, etc. It is also true that the ancient Peruvians imitated frequently in clay figures syphilitical accidents; for instance, human faces with the nose eaten away, etc. I saw at Paris, in the Ethnographical Museum of the Trocadero, many interesting specimens of Peruvian pottery of this kind.

"This naturally does not exclude that the same disease existed also in China or eastern Asia in very remote times.

"*Leprosy*: Mal de San Lazaro, lepra; in German, Aussatz. It seems to me that the Mexican Indians are entirely refractory to this terrible disease, which only exists in the Spanish class and mixed people (*gente mestiza*). Here, at Merida and other places of the peninsula, many of the principal families are infected with this plague, but I never saw or heard of a true Indian family affected with it, perhaps because the Indians are living principally on vegetable food. The Peruvian antiquities refer, as I believe, to syphilis and not to leprosy; but without doubt leprosy existed also in very ancient times in most of the Asiatic lands.

"Without doubt the snake, principally the snake head (sometimes treated naturally, sometimes in a fantastic manner with infinite variety) forms the principal element of decoration in Maya architecture. This alone would not be sufficient to establish a relationship (*Verwandtschaft*) with the architecture of the Naga tribes (*dasyu*). pre-Buddhistic snake and tree worshipers, if it were not for the fact that the Maya architecture also has some other very remarkable resemblances with ancient Hindostan architecture (pre-Aryan), attributable to the *dasyu* (Naga, etc., perhaps, to be counted with the Georgian-Hitit-Thibetan race) and even, perhaps, to the *Dravidian* style (Telinga, etc., probably of Turanian-Mongolian-Turkish origin). For instance, the Maya triangular decoration of the west façade of the eastern palace of '*las moujas*' at *Uxmal* recalls ancient Hindu wooden structures in use, for instance, in *Kashmir* bridges till our days.

"It would therefore be interesting to compare the Maya language with that of the *Naga* tribes, and also with Turanian languages of the *Dravida*."

Mr Maler adds to his letter some quotations from ancient Spanish writers bearing on the subject of pre-Columbian syphilis, which I give here in English.

Historiadores primitivos de las Indias Occidentales (Primitive Historians of the West Indies).—D. A. Gonzalez, Barcia, Madrid, 1749.

Tomo I. Oviedo in his relation ("summario") reports to the Emperor Charles V (conserving the ancient spelling), page 41. . . . Your Majesty may consider as a certain fact that this disease came from the Indies. It is very common among the Indians, but not dangerous either in those countries or in these. On the contrary, the Indians cure themselves very easily in the islands with this *pato* (guayacan-guaiac) and on terra firma with other herbs and things which they know, for they are very great vegetarians. The first time that this malady was seen in Spain was after Christopher Columbus had discovered the Indies and turned to these parts, and some Christians who came with him and assisted in this discovery, and those who made the second voyage were more numerous than the first, contracted this plague, and from them it was transmitted to other persons; and after the year 1495, when the Grand Captain Don Gonzalo

Fernandez de Cordova passed into Italy with an army to help the king, Don Fernando II, of Naples against King Charles VIII of France, the man with the thick head, being sent by the Catholic kings Don Fernando and Doña Isabel of immortal memory, ancestors of your majesty, this disease was introduced by those Spaniards, and it was the first time that it was seen in Italy, and as it was at the time when the French came with the said King Charles the Italians called that disease the French disease, and the French called it the disease of Naples, for they also had not seen it up to the time of that war, and from these it spread itself through the whole of christendom and passed into Africa by the means of some women and men attacked by it, because there is no manner in which it is so contagious as in the coitus of men and women, as has been seen many times; it also is communicated by eating in the dishes, drinking in the glasses and saucers which the diseased persons have used, and still more by sleeping in the sheets or garments of the same, and it is a grave and painful evil. No person who has eyes could help to see a number of people rotten and become lepers (*podrida, i tornada de San Laçaro*) on account of this disease; also many of them have died of it. Of the Christians who have conversation and coitus with the Indian women, few escape this danger; but as I have said, it is less dangerous there than here, both because there exists there that tree so useful and fresh it makes more operation; as for that other reason, that the temperature of the land is without cold and helps more those patients than the air and the constellations here."

* * * * *

Fernando Colon, in his historical work, says that the Indians of Haiti gave to this disease the name *caracol* or *caracacol* (shells), and to the infected *cara-caracol* = man-shell, because their skin did become rough as shells.

* * * * *

Tomo II, Historia de las Indias, . . . *Francisco Lopez de Gomara*, pagina 24, speaking of the syphilis, says also that the Spaniards did find this disease in the island "*Española*" = Haiti, etc. . . .

ALBERT S. ASHMEAD, M. D.

270 West Forty-third street, New York city.

CEREMONIAL MUTILATION.—Near Deonella or Deonhully, a town in Mysore, is a sect or subdivision of the Murresoo Wocul caste, every woman of which, previous to piercing the ears of her eldest daughter, preparatory to her being betrothed in marriage, must undergo the amputation of the first joints of the third and fourth fingers of her right hand. If the girl to be betrothed be motherless and the mother of the boy has not before been subjected to the amputation it is incumbent on her to suffer the operation.—*F. Buchanan Hamilton's Travels in Mysore in Asiatic Researches.*